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EPA analyzes mill's hazards

By AMY WELCH

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BUXTON — Environmental experts are being cautious about plans to demolish the Rogers Fibre Mill building.

"It makes sense to take it down, but we really have to be careful how we do that," Janis Tsang, on-site coordinator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), said Wednesday.

Tsang and about a dozen others

interested in cleaning up the building visited the mill as the EPA prepares to clean up hazardous chemicals in the building.

Tsang said the EPA cannot set a precedent by simply tearing down the building because it is not in the business of demolishing buildings.

"The primary focus is eliminating human and environmental threats," said Erin Heskett, community involvement coordinator for the EPA.

Residents have argued for demolition of the mill for years. A large section of the roof caved in over the winter, and the building has continued to deteriorate since then. The recent rain and high water in the Saco River have not helped either, said Fred Farnham, Buxton's code enforcement officer.

The group toured parts of the empty building, with Farnham acting as guide. On the north side of the site sits part of the building that was used as a warehouse.

Wooden pallets, old furniture and broken fluorescent light bulbs litter the room. The central section of the building is in the best shape, Farnham said, and could be recycled.

The southern end of the building is a different story, however. There, the roof has collapsed, crushing the building beneath it. Broken beams, plywood and pipes

are visible in the rubble. In addition to chemical hazards, town officials are worried about the danger posed by the crumbling mill.

"We've got to make it go away," said Selectman Bob Brandenstein, adding that four teen-agers were caught climbing in the rubble recently. "It's a physical hazard."

The mill produced fiberboard from 1917 to 1980. Since then, the building has been virtually abandoned. It is now owned by Patrick Canonica, a developer from Massa-

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chusetts. Residents have twice voted against foreclosing on the mill because they feared getting stuck with the entire demolition cost, including cleanup of any chemicals on the site.

The EPA's focus on the project is to clean up leftover chemicals and tainted material that could seep into the Saco River. Last week, the federal agency announced it would spend up to \$960,000 to clean up the site.

Tsang said the EPA may have to demolish part of the mill to accomplish that, but would prefer not to destroy the building. The first step is getting the owner's permission to

go into the mill and remove the chemicals. Canonica has not yet agreed, Tsang said.

"We don't know where (the EPA is) going to leave us," said Brandenstein, who has been working on the project for about three years. The town is in the process of applying for a grant that would pay for a detailed engineering study to help the town determine what steps to take when the EPA is finished.

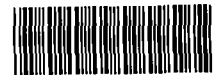
Brandenstein said he is embarrassed to get so much credit for the work that has already been done. He credited residents and past and

present politicians, including former state Sen. Willis Lord, state Sen. James Libby and U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe.

"It shows that the politicians aren't just politicians — they're out there to help the people and the communities they represent," he said.

Brandenstein said the town's next step is to finish applying for the study grant to finish the work the EPA plans to start by Aug. 1.

"It's not down yet, and I'm not going to stop until it's gone," Brandenstein said.



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